

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 IGA-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 RSC-01 PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5284

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 5896/1

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TAGS : EAID, ECON, BG

SUBJECT : FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER RESOURCE UTILIZATION
IN BANGLADESH

SUMMARY: AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE SECRETARY'S DISCUSSION OF A MULTILATERAL APPROACH TO FLOOD CONTROL WITH THE BANGLADESH LEADERSHIP DURING HIS VISIT TO DACCA, THIS MESSAGE REVIEWS THE BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATUS OF THIS PROBLEM IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL SENSE.

QUESTIONS OF FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER USAGE HAVE BEEN MAJOR CONCERNS FOR BENGALLEES SINCE HISTORIC TIMES, BUT EFFORTS TO PROMOTE VIABILITY OF BANGLADESH HAVE REFOCUSED ATTENTION ON NEED FOR REVISED LONG TERM PLANNING COUPLED WITH SHORT TERM ACTIONS IN CONTEXT OF NEW STATE'S WATER POLICIES, PRIORITIES AND MACRO-ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK. BDG HAS INITIATED MAJOR REVIEW, AND REPORT OF THEIR TASK FORCE IS UNDER CONSIDERATION. CURRENT U.S. AND OTHER PROGRAMS ADDRESS MANY IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF WATER SECTOR, BUT SCOPE OF ENTIRE RANGE OF PROBLEMS PLUS ENORMOUS FUNDING IMPLICATIONS INDICATES MAJOR THRUSTS WILL PROBABLY BE MULTINATIONAL IN NATURE BASED UPON CONSOLIDATED PROGRAMS DEVELOPED BY BDG.

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END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: EACH YEAR, CLOSE TO A THIRD OF THE 55,000 SQUARE MILE AREA OF BANGLADESH IS FLOODED. ALTHOUGH THE FLOODS BENEFIT SOME AREAS AND THE PEOPLE HAVE ADAPTED THEIR LIVES AND FARMING HABITS ACCTQLTYGLY, THE FLOODS STILL DAMAGE CROPS AND PROPERTY, CURTAIL CROP PRODUEQTION AND SOMETIMES RESULT IN LOSS OF LIFE. THE UNCERTAINTLY OF FLOODING IN TERMS OF AREA, DEPTH, DURATION AND TIME OF RECURRENCE INHIBITS DEVELOPMENT, ESPECIAGSVN AGRICULTURE. MOST OF THE FLOOD PROBLEMS RESULT FROM LARGE FLOWS IN THE MAJOR RIVERS SUCH AS THE BRAHMAPUTRA, GANGES AND MEGHNA. HOWEVER FLOODING BY SMALLER STREAMS, LOCAL RAINFALLS, THE HIGH OCEAN TIDES AND CYLONES ARE ALSO OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE. THE THREE LARGE RIVERS RISE IN, OR FLOW THROUGH CHINA, NEPAL, BHUTAN, AND INDIA (INCLUDING SIKKIM) AND HAVE A TOTAL DRAINAGE AREA OF 600,000 SQUARE MILES WITH ONLY 7.5PERCENT LYING WITHIN BANGLADESH. DURING PEAK FLOW THESE RIVERS DISCHARGE UP TO 5 MILLION CUSECS OF WATER (TWO AND ONE-HALF TIMES THE ALL-TIME RECORD OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER) AND CARRY AN ENORMOUS SEDIMENT LOAD OF ABOUT 2.4 BILLION TONS ANNUALLY, GREATER THAN ANY OTHER RIVER SYSTEM IN THE WORLD. THE RUN-OFF OF THE GANGES AND BRAHMAPUTRA RIVERS IS DERIVED FROM SNOWMELT IN THE HIMALAYAS AND FROM MONSOON RAINS ON THE LOWER ELEVATIONS. HIGH FLOWS CAN BE EXPECTED ANY TIME BETWEEN ABOUT JUNE 1, THROUGH OCTOBER. FLOOD STUDIES SHOW THAT DURING THE PERIOD BEGINNING 1954 THE FLOODED AREA OF BANGLADESH RANGED FROM 9.9 TO 17.5 THOUSAND SQUARE MILES. THE "FLOOD VULNERABLE" AREA COMES TO NEARLY 26.3 THOUSAND SQUARE MILES OR ALMOST HALF THE ENTIRE COUNTRY. THE IBRD ESTIMATES AVERAGE ANNUAL FLOOD DAMAGE ON THE ORDER OF 655 MILLION RUPEES (\$85 MILLION, 1972 PRICES). IN ITS 1972 STUDY ON FLOODS IN BANGLADESH, THE WORLD BANK CONCLUDED THAT TO PREVENT FLOODING BY THE MAJOR RIVERS, ONLY EMBANKMENTS AND CHANNEL IMPROVEMENT APPEAR TO HAVE ANY PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

2. THE AREA OF FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN A PRIMARY AREA OF INTEREST TO THE BDG. IT IS WIDELY RECGNIZED AS A DIFFICULT, EXPENSIVE, CONTROVERSIAL BUT INDISPENSABLE SECTOR OF BANGLADESH'S DEVELOPMENT FUTURE. IN THE PAST ITS PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN PRIMARILY ADDRESSED IN PIECEMEAL FASHION BY INNUMERABLE AGENCIES MAKING RANDOM APPEALS FOR UNCLASSIFIED

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PAROCHIAL INTERESTS.

3. IN RECOGNITION OF THIS UNSATISFACTORY SITUATION AND FOLLOWING A SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH THE IBRD, THE PLANNING COMMISSION ESTABLISHED A REVIEW TASK FORCE UNDER THE 1974-75 DEVELOPMENT BUDGET. UNDER THE CO-CHAIRMANSHIP OF B.M. ABBAS, THE FLOOD CONTROL ADVISOR TO THE PRIMEMINISTER AND PROFESSOR MOSHARAFF HOSSAIN OF DACCA UNIVERSITY (EX P.C. MEMBER)

THIS TASK GROUP WAS CHARGED WITH RE-EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS PLANNING AND PRODUCTION OF NEW, UNBIASED, BROAD-BASED PLAN WHICH WOULD GIVE THE GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKERS A BASIS FOR MAKING JUDGMENTS ON FUTURE PROGRAMS.

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4. AT THE REQUEST OF PROFESSOR HOSSAIN, THE IBRD PROVIDED A SIX MAN SPECIALIST TEAM FOR EXTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS LAST JULY WITH THE TWENTY BENGALI PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES ON THE TASK FORCE. A DRAFT REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS, ORCHESTRATED BY HOSSAIN, BUT WITH THE UNANIMOUS PARTICIPATION OF THIS TASK FORCE, WAS DELIVERED TO THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, P.C. AT THE END OF JULY. UNFORTUNATELY, NO ACTION HAS YET BEEN TAKEN ON THIS REPORT.

5. THIS REPORT PROVIDES A CURRENT ANALYSIS OF THE STATUS OF WATER PROBLEMS IN BANGLADESH. IT APPEARS TO BE AN HONEST ATTEMPT TO REVIEW PAST AND PRESENT WORK AND STUDIES TO HELP DEVELOP THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THE INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENT FOR MEETING THE COUNTRY'S WATER NEEDS. IT CONTAINS MANPOWER/TIME ESTIMATES TO ADDRESS INFORMATION GAPS IN SOME FIFTEEN REVIEW ACTIVITIES INCLUDING: POTENTIAL CROPS, DIVERSIFICATION, DEMAND ANALYSIS, GROUNDWATER STUDIES, COASTAL AREA DEVELOPMENT, FLOOD CAUSES, INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS, EMPLOYMENT, RIVER STABILIZATION ETC. REPORT IS NOT RELEASED AS YET BUT BELIEVE DRAFT COPY COULD BE OBTAINED FROM IBRD WASHINGTON.

WILL ATTEMPT TO POUCH COPY FROM HERE.

6. IN SEPTEMBER THE UNDP ADVANCED A PROPOSAL WHICH APPARENTLY DID NOT HAVE THE BENEFIT OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE UNCLASSIFIED

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BDG OR OTHER DONORS. IT PROPOSES A UNDP-LED GANGES/ BRAHMAPUTRA COMMISSION OF SOME 40 ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES SIMILAR IN STYLE TO THE MEKONG COMMISSION, BACKED UP BY MULTI-TIER INTERRELATED PROGRAMS COVERING MORE LOCAL ASPECTS OF WATER AND DISASTER CONTROL. THIS PAPER AUTHORED BY THE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE APPEARS TO BE PARTICULARLY OUT OF PHASE WITH THE BDG TAKS GROUP'S INTENT TO KEEP THE CONTROL OF THIS SECTORAL PLANNING FIRMLY IN BENGALEE HANDS. HOWEVER, IT DOES OUTLINE MANY OF THE COMPLICATIONS FACING ANY ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THESE PROBLEMS. COPY POUCHED 12/24/74.

7. CURRENT AND PROPOSED U.S. AID PROGRAMS ADDRESS MANY ASPECTS OF WATER MANAGEMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL, BUT ESSENTIALLY IN LIMITED AREAS. THE COASTAL EMBANKMENTS, GROUNDWATER SURVEY, POLDER MANAGEMENT AND RURAL WORKS PROJECTS ARE EXAMPLES. DURING THE FLOOD SEASON LAST SUMMER U.S. CORPS OF ENGINEER EXPERTS WERE BROUGHT IN TO ASSIST IN FLOOD ANALYSIS AND FORECASTING AND THE BDG IS CONSIDERING REQUESTING FURTHER HELP IN THIS AREA.

8. NUMEROUS OTHER DONORS ARE INTERESTED OR INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF BANGLADESH WATER RELATED ACTIVITIES. EXAMPLES ARE: SWEDEN/IDA; TUBEWELL PROGRAMS; UK; HOAR (LOW BASIN AREAS FLOODED ANNUALLY) PROJECT, TUBEWELL AND GROUNDWATER INVESTIGATIONS; IDA: CHANDPUR PROJECT AND IRRIGATION ENGINEERING PROJECT. EACH OF THESE IS A MAJOR UNDERTAKING IN TERMS OF PLANNING AND FUNDING YET THEY STILL ARE QUITE LOCALIZED IN NATURE. THEY SERVE TO UNDERLINE THE EXPENSE AND COMPLICATIONS OF PROJECTS AIMED AT OVERALL CONTROL AND USE OF THE WATER RESOURCES OF BANGLADESH. THEY DEMONSTRATE THE NEED FOR COORDINATED PLANNING AND CONSOLIDATED FUNDING, IN MAJOR PROJECT AREAS.

9. FURTHER ACTION BY EXTERNAL AGENCIES IS NOW AWAITING BDG REACTION TO TASK FORCE REPORT UNDER REVIEW.
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